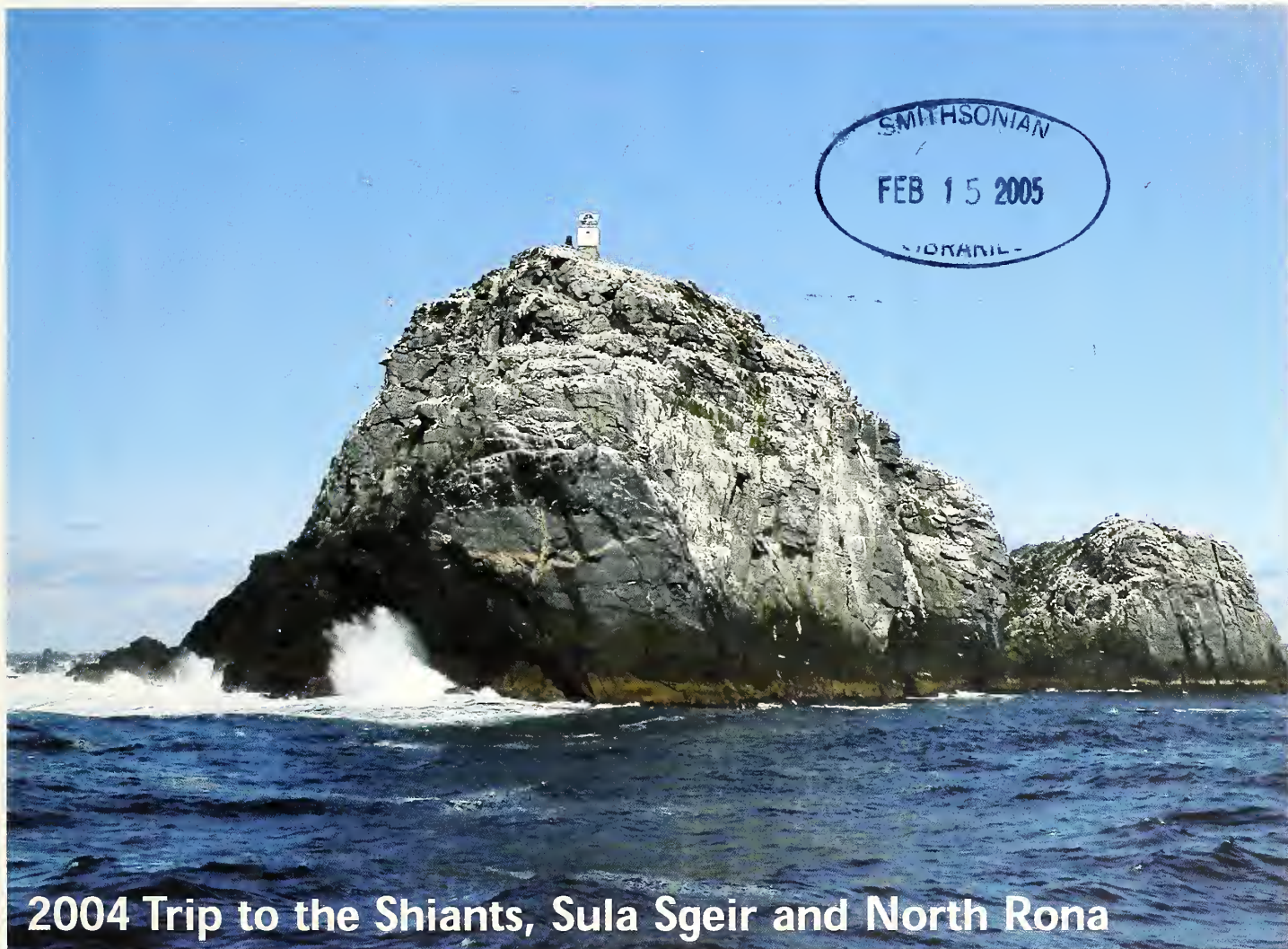


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Scottish Bird News

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE SOCIETY OF ORNITHOLOGISTS

No 74 Dec. 2004



2004 Trip to the Shiant, Sula Sgeir and North Rona

Inspired by the 2003 trip to St. Kilda, a group of SOC enthusiasts set out aboard the *Poplar Voyager* on May 15th from Kinlochbervie for another week of "island going". Our itinerary was to be very much determined by the prevailing conditions during a week when the wind rarely dropped below force 5 and the sea remained closer to rough than moderate. Remarkably, given the circumstances, skipper Bob Theakston enabled us to achieve all our objectives by exercising uncanny judgement.

First on the agenda was a rollercoaster crossing of the Minch, the detail of which this writer will spare his readers. Safely across, Loch Brollum provided a conveniently placed haven in which to spend the night. Early next morning we made straight for the Shiant and immediately went ashore to spend an

immensely enjoyable day perambulating Rough Island and House Island from end to end. Stuart Murray's specialist knowledge of Scottish seabird populations was a ready source of up to the minute data. We were fortunate, too, in having Jill Harden in the party. Jill, an archaeologist with NTS, helped us interpret the intriguing ruins at all the islands' sites. That night we anchored in the lee of a narrow storm beach that links the two westernmost Shiant so, the following morning, we would waste no time in landing on the third part of the archipelago. Day three brightened nicely as we ramified over Mary Island, sharing its grassy top with a rather edgy resident flock of sheep – and, of course, many thousand seabirds. It was another truly memorable day.

Sula Sgeir

(Iain Roy)

With the Shiant satisfyingly under our belts, our thoughts turned north, more in hope than expectation – for the forecasts remained stubbornly unpromising. Another night was spent sheltering in Loch Brollum before we continued up the Lewis coast. Again we waited, dropping the



SOC members leaving North Rona

(Iain Roy)

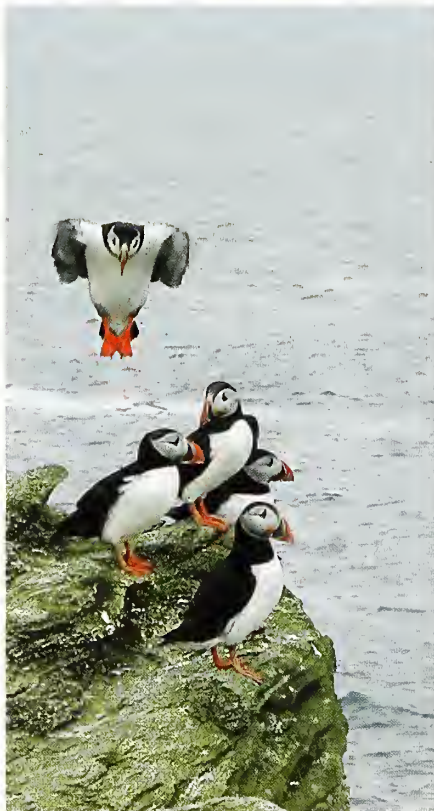


SHOUT
SHARE **IT**



House Island from Rough Island (Shiants) (Iain Roy)

anchor beneath Tolsta Head. Captain Bob's patience was rewarded. Having second-guessed the conditions perfectly, he reckoned that, if we could cope with another exhilarating dash from the Butt of Lewis, there should be every chance of reaching Sula Sgeir and setting foot on North Rona – Mecca for most on board. During a brief interval when the wind swung to the north as prophesied, we did exactly that. In gloriously bright sunshine, and on a heaving sea, we first stopped close to the rock then cruised around Sula Sgeir for a captivating couple of hours, before turning east to North Rona. There, quite late in the day, we went ashore at the east "landing" without further ado, in case we might be denied any further opportunity. After this preliminary sortie over to the village site, supper was enjoyed back on board. As dusk fell, the more intrepid members returned ashore to keep vigil until the star turn of North Rona drew nigh – the nocturnal appearance of the petrels. The smiles on the faces of our bleary-eyed shore party the next morning said it all: a lifetime's ambition realised for some, and a sense of homecoming for



Puffins

(Iain Roy)

Stuart who regards Rona as "the island that has it all". For lesser mortals there was yet another chance to go ashore and explore the island's open grassy interior, airy seabird cliffs and fascinating village site with its early chapel and even earlier cell. If ever a place might convince a sceptic that there is such a phenomenon as *genius loci*, this would be it. Alongside the older ghosts from the era of the North Ronan villagers one could feel the spirits of Fraser Darling and even more palpably, of Robert Atkinson, whose inspirational book, *Island Going*, was well thumbed by all aboard the *Poplar Voyager* before the week was out.

And so, all three objectives having been gained, there remained only the return trip on a fine rolling sea back, via Cape Wrath, to Loch Bervie – with smiles of self-satisfaction all round and a final supper in the manner to which we had become accustomed. Throughout the cruise, the hospitality on the *Poplar Voyager* had been of the highest order, one wonderful repast following another thanks to Jan our cook. The third member of our crew complemented the Captain and the cook, doing pretty well everything else: Norman was ferryman, winchman and even our waiter. Our thanks are due to Bob, Jan and Norman for making our week aboard the *Poplar Voyager* so hugely enjoyable – and for fulfilling many personal aspirations. By the end of the week, even those of us who had struggled to find our sea legs during the rougher crossings were already anticipating "the next time". A 2005 trip to the Monachs and the Flannans was already being canvassed by Stuart – now who said island-going wasn't addictive?

Iain Roy

We have now arranged two sailings for 2005 which are finalised and partly booked up already. The first will leave on Sat. 7th May (meeting up on the 6th) from Kinlochbervie, heading for North Rona, Sula Sgeir and the Shiant. The second will leave on Sat. 4th June (meeting up on the 3rd) from Oban, heading for the Monachs and Flannan Isles. For more information and bookings, please contact Bob Threackston at E-mail: bob@poplar-voyager.com Tel 07831 270892.



THE SHIANTS

The Minch



Stuart Murray and Jill Harden at the bothy on House Island (Iain Roy)



Scottish Bird News
No 74 December 2004

Edited by

Jimmy Maxwell
Ian Francis

Assisted by

Martin Collinson
Bill Gardner

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Contributions for the next issue of *SBN* should be submitted not later than 31st January 2005 to:

**SBN Editor, SOC,
Harbour Point,
Newhailes Road,
Musselburgh EH21 6SJ**

Articles can be sent on disc or by e-mail (mail@the-soc.org.uk), although we do still accept typed or handwritten material.

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NEWS & NOTICES

New Members

We welcome the following new members to the Club: **Ayrshire** Mr C Doerig, Mr W Fisher, Mrs J Gibbs, Mr D Grierson, Mr J Lawson, Mr R Shirley, Ms B Smith, Ms I Swanson. **Borders** Ms L Brydon, Mr & Mrs A Iredale, Mr D McKenna & Ms C Sawers. **Clyde** Dr & Mrs A Cameron, Mr J Clark, Mr A Dimmick, Dr K Francis, Prof J Knowler, Ms B McKellar, Mr J Stuart, Ms M Timlin, Mr M Ward. **Dumfries** Mrs D Marshall. **England, Wales & Northern Ireland** Mr & Mrs M Anthony, Ms E Ashworth, Mr D Blyth, Mr R Craigie, Mr M Hodgkin, Mr R Ledgerton, Mr D Stroud, Mr I Wallace, Mr G Wilkinson. **Fife** Ms R Garton, Mr R Shand, Mr C Whimster & J Whimster. **Grampian** Mr I Bell, Dr C Jones. **Highland** Mr & Mrs B Bates, Mr S Clinton, Mr A Kirby. **Lothian** Mrs G Brown, Mr A Gillies, Mr G Graham & Ms J Seath, Mr P Griffiths, Mrs J Haskell, Mr N Hughes, Mr W Magee, Mr F Marr, Ms R McParland & Mr O McParland, Mr & Mrs A Miller, Mr & Mrs M O'Brien, Mr N Palmer, Mr G Ross, Mr M Shaw, Mr & Mrs K Stewart, Dr D Truman. **No Branch** Mrs J Simpson. **Tayside** Mr D Brown, Mrs F Duthie, Mr D Traynor. **West Galloway** Mr W Sawyer.

200 CLUB

The latest prizewinners are:

August - 1st - £30 A. McIver; 2nd - £20 Mrs. Ablett; 3rd - £10 Dr. Boddington.
September - 1st £30 Mrs. C. Parkinson; 2nd - £20 I.J.A. Brown; 3rd £10 Sylvia Laing.
October - 1st £30 Miss J.M. Strachan; 2nd £20 Mr. R. S. Smith; 3rd £10 Dr. A. Davidson.

New members are always welcome, please contact Daphne Peirse-Duncombe at Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH.

Red Kites in Scotland

The Scottish Red Kite reintroduction has been successful and birds are now regularly turning up in all parts of Scotland. Perhaps as a result of greater observer familiarity with this species, RSPB Scotland is receiving fewer kite reports from the public. Red Kites in Scotland are still routinely marked with wing tags, to inform ongoing population and survival studies. We are anxious to receive sightings, which will then be followed up by the relevant Project Officers. The kites range expansion from the release areas in the Black Isle and near

Stirling, continues to progress slowly. We require your help by informing us of kites seen throughout Scotland, particularly outside the Black Isle and Doune/Callander areas. The Dumfries & Galloway release scheme, although still in its infancy, requires reports beyond the immediate Loch Ken area. To aid us further, it would be appreciated if you can record date, time, place name, grid reference and if possible, any details of wing tag colours and marks. Thank you for your help and in the meantime, to get great views of kites, see other farmland birds and raptors and to learn more about the re-introduction project, visit the Argaty Red Kite Project (near Stirling) run in conjunction with RSPB Scotland (<http://www.argatyredkites.co.uk>). For people living further south, the Galloway Kite Trail is open all year (<http://www.gallowaykitetrail.com>). For further details on both sites, call the RSPB Scotland Glasgow office on 0141 3319093. The Black Isle will continue to have live CCTV coverage from an active nest from May to July (contact RSPB Highland office on 01463 71500).

Black Isle: Brian Etheridge

Tel: 01463 715000

E-mail: brian.etheridge@rspb.org.uk

Central Scotland: Duncan Cameron

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Tel: 0101556670473

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Photographs for 'Birds of Scotland' – a request

Excellent progress is being made on the Club's forthcoming publication '*Birds of Scotland*' (BS3). Many draft species accounts have been written and are now with the Editorial Team. Enthusiasm amongst the 130-strong team of authors is growing, and the Club's hopes of making this a prestigious and authoritative publication are now turning into a reality.

It is the Editorial Team's ambition to include the best available Scottish photographs of all 500 species (and several distinct subspecies) – this will make the book not only a superb source of information, but also pleasing to browse. With this aim, **the Club would now like to invite ALL photographers to contribute towards this unique Club project.**

Ian Andrews and Harry Scott have agreed to coordinate the photographic aspects of the publication, with Harry taking on the 250 or so rare and scarce species and Ian coordinating the commoner species.



Purple Sandpipers (SOC photo competition winner)

(Derek B. McGinn)

Rare and Scarce Harry has scoured relevant publications for photographs of vagrants and scarce migrants and has compiled a preliminary list. However, there are doubtless many previously unpublished or little known photographs in existence that we would love to know about! Please, get in touch with Harry if you know of **any** suitable photographs, especially if you think he is unlikely to know about them already. It would be greatly appreciated if those with large collections could submit lists indicating how they rank each one (from 1 star for record shots, up to 4 stars for the best). In due course, we will publish a list on the SOC website of species for which we think there is no available photograph.

Commoner species We are aware that there are many amateur and professional photographers who have superb collections of Scottish bird photographs. We hope that all of them will wish to contribute to this important project. It is difficult for us to target specific photographs, so again we would encourage you all to submit lists of what you can offer the project (ranked, as above). We aim to publish a selection of frame-fillers, birds in habitat, nest shots, flight shots, flocks, groups and individuals, artistic compositions, historical photos etc. Above all, we are looking for those special pictures that you are particularly proud of! Again, in due course, we will publish a list of images we are still searching for.

Fees This is a Club publication, with profits being returned to the Club for use in other local and national publication projects. With this in mind, we hope that most contributing members will be willing to donate their work. However, we appreciate that several photographers make a living out of their images. With this in mind, we are in a position to offer a maximum of £10 per photograph used

(payable on publication). All members will also be eligible for a discounted book, if ordered before publication.

Logistics To alleviate problems in such a large project, we hope the following will make logistics easier. *For slides and prints:* (1) **initially, please let us know that you are interested and send us a list of what you have**, (2) we then hope to get back to you with specific requests, and maybe arrange a visit, (3) selected photos will be scanned and returned as soon as possible, (4) final decisions may mean that not all of the initial selections/scans may be used (and we hope that you will agree for these to be kept in the SOC archive). *For digital images:* we would appreciate you sending in a CD with original (non-edited) digital files. If you are sending valuable pictures in the post, please consider using registered post (with 'consquential loss' compensation cover).

BS3 photographic competition Why not send your photographs before 28 February 2005 and enter them in the BS3 Photographic Competition? It's as easy as that – and the winners will be announced at the Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference in Edinburgh in March 2005. Details are the same as in 2003, and information can be found on the SOC website (go to Publications, then BS3).

Please help make this a spectacular book and take some time to search out (or take) those extra special photos.

Contact information:

Harry Scott, 51 Charlton Crescent,
Aboyne, Aberdeenshire AB34 5GN.
E-mail: picades@ifb.co.uk

Ian Andrews, 39 Clayknowes Drive,
Musselburgh EH21 6UW.
E-mail: ian@andrewsi.freemove.co.uk
Tel: 0131 665 0236

Largest wind farm in UK threatens thousands of birds

An application was recently submitted by Amec and British Energy to build 234 wind turbines on the North Lewis Peatlands SPA. This will be hugely damaging to birds.

The developer's Environmental Statement (ES) states that: 50 Golden Eagles and 16 Red-throated Divers are at risk of colliding with the development throughout its 25-year lifetime. 352 Golden Plover and 314 Dunlin territories could be displaced during the operation of the wind farm and hundreds more will be affected during construction. Merlin, Greenshank, Whooper Swans, Greylag Geese and Corncrakes may also be affected by displacement, disturbance or collision.

SOC members may wish to write an objection letter to the Scottish Executive, ideally by 13 December 2004, but representations after that date could still be considered. Write to: Lesley Thomson, The Scottish Executive, Consents and Emergency Planning Unit, 2nd Floor, Meridian Court, 5 Cadogan Street, Glasgow G2 6AT. Email: lesley.thomson@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Martin Scott

Baron's Haugh Backdrop

With ref. to the two articles on Baron's Haugh RSPB Reserve in this and the last SBN editions, John Mitchell has written to remind us that a few years before our ideas about a reserve there developed, the area had already been under threat. He writes – In the late summer of 1974, the then Nature Conservancy Council received notification of a plan to dump hundreds of tons of building rubble on the low-lying meadowland, this vast quantity of waste material generated by Motherwell and District's redevelopment schemes. Once levelled out, it was the intention to add slag followed by top soil to create a golf course on the site.

The local NCC staff were very much aware of the considerable loss of cattle-grazed wet grassland that had already taken place along this stretch of the River Clyde's flood plain, directly or indirectly as a result of the construction of the M74. During a field visit in September, officers also noted the potential to enhance this particular site. Riverside embankments formerly intended to keep flood water out could readily be adapted to hold water in at a controlled level.

Accordingly, NCC objected to the development proposals for Baron's Haugh, their comments on the quality and increasing scarcity of this type of habitat in Central Scotland being accepted by the planning authority. Thus the immediate crisis was averted.

WATERSTON HOUSE PROJECT UPDATE

The new Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre takes shape at Aberlady, East Lothian.

Just as August 2004 decided to be one of the wettest months of the year, our builders, John Dennis & Co. Ltd of Bonnyrigg, started on site at Aberlady.

After working with Jenny Humphries of Simpson & Brown, our architects, on designs and drawings for two years, I was pleased to see the setting out pegs signalling the beginning of the SOC Waterston House project. On this page you can see some images of the building under construction. It is hoped that we will move in next June and be open to members and the public by July 2005. As of the second week in Nov 2004 we are still, just about, on target for this.

The main construction contract for the 4000sq ft building is worth approximately £550,000 with the landscaping/waterfeatures and planting a further £55,000. Both the Club and SOC Enterprises Ltd are now registered for Vat, enabling us to reclaim the £60,000 already paid out in Vat on the site purchase, design fees and first half of the construction costs. Substantial grant applications are currently being submitted to HLF, SNH and various charitable trusts for equipment and help with two new staff and one existing post. Other applications to Landfill Tax donors and corporate sponsors will hopefully bring in a further £80,000 in external funds to add to the £80,000 or so worth of gifts in kind already raised for the project over the last year.

So far, CALA Group have promised £20,000 to match the £13,000 in cash, plus some £7000 in gift aid already raised by SOC members. These key early cash donations, plus pledges from the 200 Club, help me, as the main fundraiser, to attract additional funding from new sources outwith the SOC. I'd also like to

stress just how crucial the large Gifts in Kind have been. SOC is indebted to Forest Enterprise, Superglass Ltd, Lafarge Cement, James Jones Ltd, Russwood Ltd, Redland Roofing & Worcester Bosch for their remarkable generosity which has helped create a really special centre for ornithology in Scotland.

In addition SOC should thank our key sub-contractor, Carpenter Oak and Woodland Ltd., of Kirriemuir, for a simply fantastic job on the manufacture and erection of the massive Douglas Fir frame. The F.E. foresters from Fort Augustus, who felled and extracted the timber, came down recently to see how their timber had been used and were very, very impressed. Ian Pirie, Sales Director of James Jones Ltd, whose sawmills processed the Forest Enterprise timber, was equally impressed. Everyone who visits the site mentions the outstanding location of the new building and John Dennis's efficient construction operation.

By the time you read this, the clay tile roofing and European Larch cladding will have made the Centre wind and weather proof. In the early New Year we will see the insulation, underfloor heating and internal walls started. All our electrics, gas, and water installation, plus lighting and heating controls were designed by our neighbours at Harbour Point, Alan Cumming Associates, our M&E Engineers. The Quantity Surveyors are Hardies of Dunfermline, working alongside Wm Rudd Davidson on the Civil Engineering aspects of the job. As SOC's Development Manager, I am very proud of what's been achieved so far. Special thanks to Brian Downing and Vicky McLellan of the SOC PWG for their help.

Bill Gardner



View east across the top of the Library, note the spare loft space.



Andreas, Graham & colleagues from Carpenter Oak & Woodland



Bill Gardner and P5 from Aberlady Primary visiting the site.



Start of front office wall, windows and entrance doorway.



Malcolm, David, BG, Grant & Neil from F.E.



Charlie Riddell, BG, and Ian Pirie (James Jones)



Our first ever visitor made their mark, but which species?



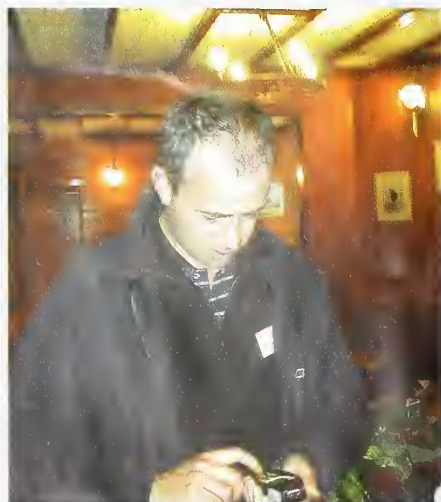
Once again, our SOC Conference and AGM was located at the Balavil Sport Hotel in Newtonmore. The event took place over the weekend 29th-31st Oct. and its success reflected all the hard work of the organising committee and SOC staff. This report is a combined effort by editor Jimmy Maxwell, ably assisted by Campbell McLellan, Duncan Watt, Donald Stewart, John Reid, Janet Crummy, Brian Smith and Paul Speak.

Friday night

Mark Holling, SOC President, opened the Conference and welcomed all those attending. This year's theme 'Special Birds and Special Places' got off to a fine start with our first speaker, Ian Thomson, Warden of Aberlady Reserve...

Ian Thomson – Aberlady

Ian opened his talk confidently with a systematic review of his reserve highlighting the diversity of habitat then methodically covering in turn birds, plants, invertebrates and mammals. The



growing status of the reserve in relation to these species was quoted until it was designated as a Ramsar site. Particular attention was given to the reductions in Terns, Ringed Plover and Eider and on the botanical side, the introduction of Sea Buckthorn with its positive and negative implications was noted. An expansive discussion of Pinkfeet and their use of surrounding farmland made clear that Aberlady was an 'all year round' place. My personal interest was stimulated no end by the revelation that this is the best UK site for Red-necked Grebes. Aberlady as a site for migrant rarities was illustrated and the importance of raptor passage shown. Subsequent question time revealed a stout defence of the current access policy, even under possible future 'benign' pressure from the new Waterston House - a good robust talk.

C. Mc L.

The SOC Bird-brain Quiz followed in the bar, conducted in true showbiz style and much humour by Brian Smith. The audience, organised in competitive table groups, became involved in a hectic and hilarious contest to find the answers to an extremely devious selection of outlandish birdy questions devised by Bill Gardner.

As alcohol gradually kicked in, answers became more and more vocal and not a little ribald and Brian did a magnificent job in keeping his quiz on some kind of coherent footing. This was a supreme example of birders letting their hair down and got the Conference off to a relaxed start. Surely it must become an annual feature?

*Ian checking news of the Masked Shrike on his mobile phone
(Jimmy Maxwell)*

Saturday morning

The birdwatching weather cleared from early morning mists to warm midday sunshine. One flock of Waxwings was found near Insh and Blackcocks with winter Thrushes were seen up behind the Hotel then lunch.

Saturday afternoon

Following some opening announcements, the afternoon lectures commenced.....

Keith Brockie – High Voltage Birds

Keith Brockie, the tree-climbing ringer, artist and nest-builder extraordinary, demonstrated for us his unique combination of talents which rank him amongst our foremost ornithologists. The views over Perthshire from several osprey eyries were breathtaking, especially the one taken from his relocated nest towards the hide at Loch of the Lowes. He showed how effective the nestlings' pattern of light and dark lines is as a camouflage, protecting them from aerial predation. Another part of the protection process is the marking of eggs in black ink and with invisible ultraviolet codes.



*Keith having a chat with Janet Crummy
(Bill Gardner)*

The only drawing in the talk was a revealing sketch in one of his own notebooks from when he was 15, not out of modesty concerning his illustrator's craft, but because this talk was about his work with birds as an accomplished field ornithologist. He explained the history of Osprey work from the persecution which led to its extinction, through the Harvey Brown 1906 advocacy of nesting platforms, to the natural return of the birds as a breeding species, then up-to-date with Scottish statistics regarding the Ospreys of his beloved Perthshire.

The conservation of *Pandion haliaetus* has been a story of struggle over many decades, resulting in today's success, only by the dedication of ornithologists such as Keith Brockie. Whatever he may yet achieve, this Club stands ready to applaud him as one of our brightest lights.

D.W.

Duncan Orr-Ewing – 15 Years of Scottish Red Kites

This was in essence a progress report on the Red Kite re-introduction programme since its inception in 1989 - just over 100 years after the last native birds in Scotland had been persecuted to extinction. The kites introduced to the first area chosen, the Black Isle, had been welcomed by most of the local farmers; they had nested at a younger age than expected and produced good numbers of young. Their longer-term survival however, had not been so good and this was almost certainly due to persecution and deliberate poisoning on certain estates and grouse-moors. The second re-introduction in central Scotland, near Doune, was showing signs of being more successful, as was the third stage which had begun in Galloway in 2001. Persecution seemed to be less of a problem in these areas and it was reasonable to assume that the three populations would continue to expand and eventually join up naturally. Taken together with the success of the re-introductions in England and the spread at last of the relict Welsh population, the future of the Red Kite in Britain looked secure. This was particularly important as the species had not been doing so well in recent years in other parts of its range, e.g. in Spain and the former East Germany where agricultural 'improvements' were taking their toll. There were now 820 pairs in Britain (but only 35 of these in the Black Isle), out of a world population of at most 24,000 pairs, restricted to Europe and a few places in North Africa.

D.S.

After the 200 Club draw with Daphne Peirse-Duncombe came tea and coffee. Between lectures and at any of the spare moments during the weekend, many of the 116 or so delegates took the opportunity to visit the books and visual arts room upstairs. There were varied displays on offer – a group of small studies by Ian Wallace, paintings by Duncan Watt and also the usual selection that we have come to expect from Keith Brockie. Eric McCabe



Ian Wallace discusses his work (Jimmy Maxwell)



Duncan Watt and Malcolm Porteous in serious debate (Jimmy Maxwell)

had an attractive display of his bird photographs and the customary variety of optics was there for everyone to try out.

A multitude of books from Subbuteo and Second Nature was tempting, especially the new "Beguiled by Birds" which its author Ian Wallace was happy to sign. Back downstairs, one could spend some time judging the fine display of photographic prints of the SOC Photographic Competition. Bill Gardner had spent much time scanning, printing and setting this up and the standard was very high indeed. Congratulations to the overall winner, Derek B. McGinn, whose photo is shown on Page 4. The audience then settled for the last lecture of the afternoon...

David Jardine – Choughed with Colonsay

Following a description of the geography of the island, David highlighted the salient features of its economy, agriculture, habitats and range of birds, both resident and migratory. The economy is tourist-based with a seasonal increase in population from the usual 120 to 500. Agriculture features livestock rearing exclusively and the outwintering of cattle is important. Habitats range from cliffs, some woodland, grazed areas and shoreline. Birds of note, apart from the Choughs, are Corncrake, Twite, Ringed Plovers, Common Sandpipers, various raptors, significant numbers of breeding seabirds and passage geese. David pointed out that in the 19th century, Choughs were common on Colonsay but in decline on Islay, whereas these trends were almost reversed in the 20th century. Coming up to date, he reported that in 2004 there were 18 pairs on the island. A clutch of 4-6 eggs is laid in early April and hatch in early May. The chicks remain in family groups until they join the non-breeding flock in autumn. In winter the birds feed mainly at the shore. The study has confirmed the importance of grazed habitat for the Chough but has also provided evidence that wet weather in the autumn and spring preceding the breeding season may seriously affect the availability of the invertebrates on which they feed - hence reducing breeding success.

J.R.

Annual AGM

Late afternoon saw Mark Holling leading members through the 68th AGM. We were advised that next year's Conference would again be at Newtonmore and the Spring Conference at Edinburgh Botanic Gardens on 12th March, with the theme "Wings of Change". We were also informed that the new company set up to run Waterston House is known as "SOC Enterprises Ltd."

In the Annual Report, Kate Walshaw was welcomed as our new Admin. Officer and all staff and serving committees were thanked for their efforts during the year. SOC membership was now rising again and work on SB3, the coming book on the birds of Scotland, was progressing well. Dick Vernon, Treasurer, explained matters concerning capital and recurrent spend, described the healthy state of the Waterston House finance and also encouraged members to sign up for Gift Aid. The question of the extreme expense of our annual audit was aired and promised due consideration.

Bill Gardner then gave a very upbeat commentary to a video of the current Waterston House construction which is well on track timewise.

After a welcome agreement from Russell Young to serve on until 2006, "Any other business" brought supportive comments from Duncan Watt on the current progress of *Scottish Bird News* – sentiments which were readily echoed at the top table and from members.

Saturday night

After a superb dinner, guest of honour, Ian Wallace entertained the audience with a humorous speech linked to



Andy Thorpe and Mary Hogg 'Come dancing' at the conference (Bill Gardner)

chosen excerpts from his new book "Beguiled by Birds" (see review in this edition). The evening was thereafter an informal mix of music, dancing and "catching up" chat, liberally interlaced with sustenance from the bar.

Sunday morning

Breakfast and straight into a full morning of lectures.....

Alastair McNee – Scottish Video Birding

Al McNee, chairman of Highland branch, has started to video birds in the last couple of years. Travelling to Edinburgh for meetings, he goes via Loch of Strathbeg, Fifeness or anywhere else that has a rare or unusual bird! Here on Sunday morning he appeared fresh and ready to entertain his audience despite having been kept awake by dubious karaoke performances emanating from the bar on the previous night.

His first video (on power point) was of a trip with highland ringers to the RSPB reserve on the wee island of Eilean Hoan off the north coast of Scotland, near Durness. They stayed in the bothy and ringed gulls, Shags, Storm Petrels which were nesting in the stone walls around the bothy and counted the sheep on the island. They were there 24 hours and were lucky enough to have good weather. His film showed the ringing technique for some of us who have never been out with ringers and the importance of putting the young gulls back exactly where they had been hiding in the grass so that the parents could find them again.

The other video was of some of the more unusual birds and indeed rare ones that Al has seen from all around Scotland. They included clips of Great Grey Shrike, Hawfinch, Hobby, Nightingale, Black-headed Bunting, Red-footed Falcon, Scops Owl and Woodchat Shrike. It was a wonderful collection of birds and nice change from still photos. Thank you Al.

J.C.

Unfortunately, Dennis Johnston was unable to give us his Handa talk, but the space was ably filled by a testing little selection of mystery photos from Ian Thomson and Mark Holling. Having to identify birds, plants and insects stimulated much discussion and provided an excellent balance with the other lectures. Many thanks to both. Coffee time again - then on to our last two speakers...



White Wagtail with Iain (Jimmy Maxwell)

Iain Livingstone - White Wagtail : The Invisible Migrant

Iain started by describing an "accidental discovery" in autumn 1999 in Strathclyde Country Park. While ringing birds from a roost of Pied Wagtail, he realised that a bird of different appearance was "in the hand" – a White Wagtail! Perceived wisdom in the form of members of Clyde Branch SOC was that this species, breeding in Iceland, migrates directly south without a stopover in Scotland – this belief was about to be challenged! Iain and friends now monitor autumn roosts that reach 600 birds in East Kilbride where the incidence of WW can exceed that of PW. His experiences have converted Clyde Branch and set himself wondering, "do WW breed right up the West Coast of Scotland?"

We were led through a systematic identification of both WW & PW. By the end, we felt that we could identify post juveniles, 1st winter, or adult birds and whether they were male or female. We had learnt to ignore rumps & flanks until heads had been carefully checked for grey or white. Crowns and ear-coverts being observed, we were allowed to move to wing bars and the remains of juvenile plumage. Finally Iain allowed his well-trained audience to judge the fine grey/black shadings of the rump. To hear from a man who can tell a WW from a PW by feel, that we still lack full knowledge of the breeding and migration of WWs in Britain, made me realise that our collective knowledge of all birds is continually extended by meticulous enthusiasts like Iain.

B.S.

Ray Murray - Yellow Wagtail: a Rare Breeding Bird in Scotland

Continuing the wagtail theme, Ray Murray told us about a study of Scotland's only remaining breeding population of Yellow Wagtails, in the Tweed Haughs in eastern Borders. The loss of other populations, notably in Clyde, seemed to be related to agricultural changes, possibly the earlier

cutting of silage fields (their preferred habitat there). The Borders birds prefer the wide flood plains of the Tweed, with winter-sown crops for nesting, hedges as song-posts and riverbank areas, maintained for anglers, to feed in.

Making the point that the song heard locally is unlike that on the standard recordings, Ray then moved on to discuss the race of the Borders birds. By comparing photographs with the illustrations in *Pipits and Wagtails of Europe*, they seem unlike the normally-accepted British race *flavissima*. Other comparisons with *flava* (north and central Europe), *thunbergi* (Scandinavia) and *feldegg* (eastern Europe), all of which have been recorded in Scotland, showed clear differences. Indeed, the nearest in plumage terms appears to be the Russian race *beema*, of which one was shot in Fair Isle in 1910! Relationships in the Yellow Wagtail group are notoriously difficult to sort out and Ray concluded by reminding us that, although further work is needed, there may soon not be a Scottish population left to study!

P.S.

As Mark Holling brought this Conference to a close, some were hurrying to Fife for the Masked Shrike – others looking forward to a journey home through the glorious autumn colours. Everyone, courtesy of a stimulating group of speakers, had found new "Special Places" and certainly enjoyed a variety of "Special Birds", all in the welcoming atmosphere created by the Hotel staff – my feeling was that they had shared a lot of good fun as well – here's to the next one !

Jimmy Maxwell



Ray Murray with Mark Holling (Jimmy Maxwell)

The Black-throated Diver Raft Programme in Scotland



(Russell Cooper)

Background

In the mid-1980s, there were many concerns regarding the breeding status of Black-throated Divers in Scotland. These appear mainly to have stemmed from a comment in Thom (1986), attributed to Roy Dennis, that a 'more comprehensive' survey in 1982 had found an estimated total adult population of 55-60 birds [not pairs] in the four northern counties. This contrasted sharply with Bundy (1979), who reported finding 40-42 pairs in three areas of the northwest Highlands in 1977, and led Thom (1986) to state 'With a total population of not more than 100 pairs, and numbers declining in some parts of the range, the future of the Black-throated Diver must give cause for concern'. In addition, a review of the current breeding status carried out in the late 1980s (Mudge *et al* 1991) identified 22 territories that had apparently ceased to be occupied since the 1970s. All this was interpreted as a rapid population decline, despite the fact that a national survey carried out in 1985 (Campbell and Talbot 1987), which did not achieve complete coverage in some remote areas, estimated that there were 151 summering pairs, a figure similar to the estimate given in the 1968-72 Atlas of Breeding Birds (Sharrock 1976).

Genesis of the Raft Programme

Throughout the various surveys, it was noted that productivity was consistently

poor, with pairs fledging just one chick every four years on average. A study carried out in Sweden (Nilsson 1977) suggested that this was roughly half the productivity needed to maintain a stable population. In the mid-1980s in the northwest Highlands, it was found that, whilst 48% of nest failures were due to predation, 13% due to illegal egg collecting and 5% due to disturbance, 30% of nests failed due to either flooding, stranding as water levels fell or being washed away by waves during strong winds (Mudge and Talbot 1993). Black-throated Divers, though expert on water, are not the most agile of creatures on land. Therefore, they typically build their nests less than one metre from the waters edge and show a significant preference for nesting on islands where one is available. One obvious solution to the problem of poor productivity, appeared to be nests that rise and fall with fluctuating water levels. These would also reduce predation by Foxes, although by far the commonest mammalian predator is undoubtedly the Otter, which will also kill adults on occasion, and the Mink, which has only become a problem in recent years.

Development

David Merrie had first pioneered diver rafts in Argyll in 1976, but in the late 1980s, RSPB and Forestry Commission staff developed the design further, with

around 15 located on selected territories by 1992. Monitoring during the breeding season quickly proved their effectiveness and subsequently a large-scale programme of raft provision was rolled out in 1992 and 1993, such that by the end of 1993 there were 63 rafts on 61 territories. Several factors were taken into account when choosing a location for a raft. The main factor considered was the loch catchment area, and how prone it is to sudden changes in water levels, but other important factors were ease of access and, of course, landowner permission. Generally, rafts were moored close to a recent natural nest site. However, inconspicuousness from public view, shelter from prevailing winds and water depth are also important considerations.

Raft Design

The largest are 3.6m x 2.4m in area and are made up of three large polystyrene blocks sandwiched within a wooden frame. Some smaller ones (2.4m x 2.4m) have also been made for more sheltered sites, using only two polystyrene blocks. Although Black-throated Diver nests have been found on very small islands, much larger rafts were built to ensure stability, and to allow good vegetation cover to develop. The rafts are covered in hessian to assist turf in rooting, and enclosed in a layer of fishing net, sown together to form a bag. The net also assists rooting and



Raft ready for turfing

(Russell Cooper)

helps to hold the raft together in the event of accidental grounding. Before positioning, the raft is covered in locally sourced grass and heather turfs, which soon root into the polystyrene and grow vigorously. Turfs are secured using lengths of wire bent into U-shaped staples. Completed rafts look very similar to small natural islands and the most luxuriant rafts may even have their own Water Vole populations and a miniature forest of Willow trees! Anchors, weighing c50 kg, are made by filling 25 litre drums with concrete, with two one-metre lengths of angle iron set at right angles through the base. A triple loop of 24mm diameter rope, protruding from the concrete, attaches the anchors to the raft and bricks weigh down the anchor ropes to make them inconspicuous. Each raft is moored using six or more anchors.

Maintenance and Raft Replacement

Every year, each raft receives a comprehensive spring maintenance visit and most also have an autumn visit. Some rafts are moved each winter to a more sheltered mooring, which in one case involves towing the raft 6km down the loch over a period of several hours. In the early years, several rafts were de-turfed and pulled ashore for the winter months. However, it was found that this procedure caused long-term damage to the rafts and the practice has now stopped. Despite this, there is always much work to do, re-positioning rafts that have dragged their anchors, replacing missing turfs or more general maintenance work. The design and regular maintenance of rafts means they have a good lifespan. However, after 10-12 years a number of the more exposed rafts have come to the end of their useful service and decisions have had to be made about their decommissioning and possible replacement. The cost of decommissioning a raft, building a new one and installing it on site is well in excess of £1000, and therefore only a few rafts have been removed in recent years. These rafts had never been used by Black-throated Divers and were

particularly expensive to monitor and maintain due to their remoteness. This meant that the total number of rafts available has fallen to 53 on 52 territories, although one or two will be installed under Forestry Commission Scotland funding during the next few years. The process of raft re-placement is ongoing, and currently we are building two new rafts each winter. We are also considering alternative designs, but most of these appear to be much more expensive in material costs, although they should last longer and require less maintenance.

Monitoring

RSPB Scotland has co-ordinated surveys of Black-throated Divers since the early 1980s, with a much more intensive effort since 1992. All raft sites, along with a sample of natural sites, have been monitored annually since then, allowing the breeding success of pairs using rafts to be compared with pairs that use natural sites. Proving that a pair of Black-throated Divers has made a breeding

attempt can be both difficult and time consuming. We have learnt a lot over the last few years and I now firmly believe that many territorial pairs do not attempt to breed in every year, probably because, for one reason or another, they have failed to get into breeding condition. Our monitoring period runs from 1 May to 31 July and every year a variety of territories appear to be unoccupied during this period, despite the fact that pairs had been seen on these territories in March/April. There are numerous other problems involved as well, not least the fact that the breeding attempt can be very short-lived and therefore easily missed. Adults are experts at concealing their presence, and sometimes leave their nest unobserved to feed away from the territory, or the incubating adult may simply be invisible from the loch shore, such as on a wooded island. In addition, chicks are particularly easy to overlook, as they are often left unattended for long periods, giving the impression that the breeding attempt has failed. Chicks are also experts at hiding, either on the loch shore under overhanging banks, on an island or in emergent vegetation. They will often hide for long periods, even when their parents are feeding nearby, again giving the impression that the breeding attempt has failed.

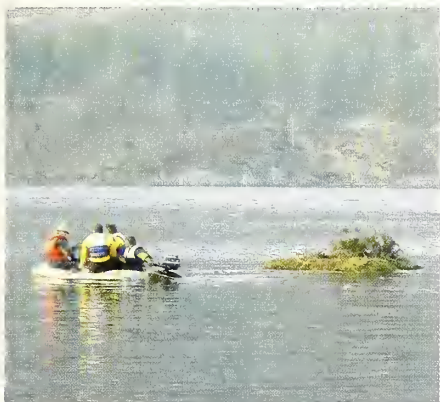
A standard method for monitoring territories has been developed over the years. Following a review in 2001 and 2002 this methodology has been improved to ensure the quality of data gathered by fieldworkers is the best possible, given the limited resources available. To qualify as occupying a territory, a pair must be present on at least one visit between 1st May and 15th June. Observers are required to make at least three evenly spaced visits during



Turfing up a new raft

(Russell Cooper)

this period to try to confirm that a breeding attempt has taken place. Further visits are made between 16th June and 31st July to look for chicks, whether or not breeding was proven earlier in the season. Once chicks have grown to at least two-thirds adult size (about four weeks old), they are assumed to have fledged unless proven otherwise. Research has shown that an insignificant percentage of chicks fail to fledge once they have reached this age, most chick mortality occurring in the first few days of life. Observers are encouraged to watch a territory for in excess of two hours at a time, unless breeding is proven sooner, or chicks are seen.



Towing into position

(Russell Cooper)

Results

By the end of 1997, 44 rafts had been used at least once and many were in regular use. Since then, the number of unused rafts has steadily dwindled and, after two were used for the first time in 2004, the number used has now reached 50. A

paper comparing fledging success from raft nests with that from natural nests in the period 1980-1997 (Hancock 2000), showed that rafts had improved productivity by a factor of 2.7 (95% confidence limits 1.3-6.2), and had probably improved the productivity of the Scottish population by 44% (7-130%). More recently, a run of comparatively dry winters, followed by sudden rises in water levels in the main incubation period (late May and early June), has meant that productivity at natural sites has been even lower than average. In 2003 for example, 38 territorial pairs where no raft was available, or which chose not to use the raft, fledged just three young at an average 0.08 per pair. Meantime, 33 pairs that were known to have nested on rafts fledged 24 young at 0.73 per pair. Overall, in the period 1992-2003, productivity from raft nests has averaged 0.57 young per pair (n=357), whilst productivity at natural sites has averaged 0.26 young per pair (n=679) or 0.18 young per traditional territory monitored (n=953).

It is now generally accepted that the raft programme has achieved what it set out to do, namely increase the productivity of the Scottish Black-throated Diver population. However, has this resulted in an increase in the number of territorial pairs? The answer to this has to be a qualified Yes! A more comprehensive national survey in 1994 gave a population estimate of 189 territorial pairs (Whyte *et al* 1995). A new monitoring programme, initiated in 2004, is attempting to gain a

more accurate population estimate by surveying all the traditional territories in Special Protection Areas (SPAs) each year, and all territories outside SPAs at least once over a six-year period. Hopefully, this will be backed up by a full national survey scheduled for 2006. However, over the past few years we have found pairs breeding at sites where they have not previously been known to breed, or at sites that had apparently been unoccupied for many years. The first phase of this monitoring work carried out in 2004 has been very encouraging, and I would not be surprised to find that the current population now exceeds 200 pairs.

Acknowledgements

RSPB Scotland are very grateful to Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland and Shin Smolts Ltd who have provided funding for this project over the years. We would also like to acknowledge the help and co-operation of all the landowners, land managers, estate staff and local diver enthusiasts who have assisted with the raft programme over the years. Without them, none of this would have been possible.

Whyte, C., Hancock, M. H., Bainbridge, I. & Jackson, D. 1995. The joint RSPB SNH 1994 Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica* survey. Unpublished Royal Society for the Protection of Birds report.

**Dave Butterfield, RSPB Scotland
North Scotland Regional Office**



Black-throated Diver safely brooding

(Chris Gommersall, RSPB)



(SNH)

New ACCESS - rights and responsibilities for Birdwatchers

You may have read in the press about the new access legislation in Scotland, possibly even responded to the public consultation on the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, but perhaps you are wondering how this will affect you as a birdwatcher and someone who enjoys visiting the outdoors. If so, this article is aimed at you.

The new statutory right of responsible access which will soon be in place will provide more opportunities for everyone to enjoy the outdoors for recreation and educational purposes or simply to cross land. Scottish Ministers are expected to announce the commencement date for the new access arrangements shortly. Access rights will apply over most land and inland water in Scotland, from urban parks to

remote moorlands. Some land is excluded such as buildings and their immediate surroundings, land in which crops are growing, construction sites or working quarries, and visitor attractions or other such places which charge for entry. Access rights can be exercised for several different purposes, specifically for recreation, education, certain commercial activities, and for crossing land or water. The rights apply to activities above or below ground, and access can be undertaken at any time of the day or night. Certain activities are excluded such as hunting, shooting, fishing, and motorised activities (other than a vehicle or vessel which has been constructed or adapted for use by a person who has a disability and which is being used by such a person).

These new access rights do not affect existing rights, such as public rights of way and navigation, nor existing rights on the foreshore. You should also be aware that, whilst charges cannot be made for access (except where the public were admitted only on payment for not fewer than 90 days in the year ending 31 January 2001), fees can be levied for facilities such as car parking or use of hides and for services such as guided walks or hire of binoculars.

The Scottish Outdoor Access Code (hereafter called the Code) provides guidance on the responsibilities of those using access rights and of those managing land and water. The Code has been approved by Ministers and the Scottish Parliament following extensive public consultation. The Code is based on three key principles which apply equally to the public and land managers. These are

- respect the interests of other people;
- care for the environment; and
- take responsibility for your own actions.

The Code provides details on how these principles should be translated into practice, and includes a useful guide to responsible behaviour for the most commonly encountered activities, settings and situations.

So what does this mean for birdwatchers?

The first thing to note is that wildlife watching and recording falls within access rights. Birdwatching could come under one or more of the specified purposes of access rights - recreation if carried out as a hobby, education if it was concerned with furthering a person's understanding of the natural heritage; or the relevant commercial category if it was, for example, someone leading a birdwatching holiday. There are some important provisos to ensure that land management and natural heritage considerations are taken into account.

Caring for the environment

Experiencing the natural heritage can help build our appreciation of its value and importance and stimulate involvement in its protection and improvement. However, when exercising access rights we need to take account of the impact of our presence on the natural heritage, particularly on land being managed for conservation. This can best be done by

- not intentionally or recklessly disturbing or destroying plants, eggs, birds and other animals, or geological features;
- not lingering if it is clear that your presence is causing significant disturbance to a bird or other wild animal;
- following any agreed local information aimed at preventing significant

disturbance to protected plants, birds or other animals, or at preventing the spread of erosion in more sensitive areas;

- taking extra care to avoid disturbing more sensitive birds and animals, particularly during their breeding season; and by
- taking your litter away with you

In most cases, disturbance to wildlife can be avoided by using common sense and judgement, based on the above guidance in the Code. In a small number of areas and for very specific reasons, such as to protect a rare plant or bird, you may be asked to follow a specific route or not to exercise your access rights. In these cases, access might be managed through voluntary agreements, signs or byelaws. It is worth noting that some of our most important sites and species have recently been given extra protection against criminal damage and disturbance by the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act.

Responsibilities for group activities and wildlife surveys

Access rights extend to groups as well as individuals, though the Code emphasises that extra care should be taken if you are involved in organising a group activity. Whilst as an individual you might visit a place only occasionally and feel that you are causing no harm, the land manager or the environment might have to cope with the cumulative effects of many people. Thus, if you are organising an educational visit (e.g. field studies group), relevant land managers should be contacted and their advice followed on what precautions you might need to take. Similar consideration should be shown towards the potential cumulative impact of repeat visits on the environment, in order to avoid inadvertently disturbing sensitive species or habitats.

As previously mentioned, wildlife watching and recording come under access rights. This is an important way in

which people gain enjoyment and understanding of their environment, and birdwatchers' observations often make a valuable contribution to species monitoring. The specific guidance on wildlife surveying in the Code indicates that anyone planning an intensive survey over a small area or making frequent repeat visits should consult the relevant land manager to let them know of their intentions, and anyone requiring the installation of any equipment or instruments should seek the land manager's permission. Land managers are advised, wherever possible, to co-operate with people who wish to carry out a survey and allow the taking of small samples where this would not cause any damage.



SCOTTISH OUTDOOR ACCESS CODE

Know the Code!

The Scottish Outdoor Access Code will be essential reading for anyone going into the outdoors. It is currently on SNH's website (www.snh.org.uk), but will be published and widely distributed, along with a range of introductory leaflets, in the near future – look out for these. A new website dedicated to outdoor access in Scotland www.outdooraccess-scotland.com will soon be available as well. This will provide information for both access users and land managers, with links to good practice developed by particular interest groups and relevant organisations. Further information and advice on specific access issues can be given by your local authority or national park authority.

SNH has a duty to publicise and promote understanding of the Code, and has planned a long-term access education programme to raise awareness of the new access rights and responsibilities. As well as seeing the Scottish Outdoor Access Code logo in many different places (shown above), you will also be hearing a lot over the coming months about *Know the Code!* Hopefully you now know something about the Code and how it relates to your interests, and you know where to find out more.

Caroline Fyfe

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Birding in the hills

(Jimmy Maxwell)



Ringed Plover on nest (Jimmy Maxwell)

New ACCESS – what effects on BIRDS ?

Human access and recreational disturbance are sometimes alleged to have severe adverse effects on birds, and there are worries about the impacts of the new legislation – but are such fears justified? A recent literature review by Emily Woodfield and Rowena Langston has tried to address this question, in relation to similar access legislation for parts of England and Wales *; as yet, there is no equivalent published review for Scotland, but the issues are very similar. The new Scottish legislation also includes access to water, but this is not considered here.

People on foot potentially cause disturbance to breeding birds in several ways, which vary in consequence according to the bird species and the stage in their life cycle. Many studies indicate that dogs are perceived as more of a threat and cause more disturbance to birds, than people alone. This is not surprising, as dogs resemble and can be predators.

Breeding birds

Many studies demonstrate that birds are deterred from breeding in areas where there are large numbers of people. A few studies have demonstrated the potential for an impact at the population level, such as Stone Curlews on downland. Some studies show that birds learn to avoid people, so only birds that have bred on a site before will avoid more disturbed areas; for example, Ringed Plovers on coastal beaches. Disturbance therefore can reduce the availability of suitable nesting habitat, and reduce population size.

In the case of Golden Plover and Dunlin on moorlands in the Peak District, there was a reduction in available breeding habitat only in areas with most visitors. This effect was reduced or removed when most walkers remained on a surfaced path, rather than dispersing more widely across the moor. Disturbance of incubating birds may lead to the bird leaving the nest, exposing the nest to predation or adverse weather. In the case of Nightjars on heathland, nesting success

was reduced closer to paths or in areas with a high density of footpaths, and where nest vegetation cover was reduced. Most failures were due to predation when the incubating bird was off the nest. Direct trampling of eggs and chicks can also be a problem, particularly with Ringed Plovers on beaches.



Arctic Tern defending nest (Jimmy Maxwell)

At the pre-fledging stage, much research shows reduced chick foraging and/or chick provisioning, but it is not always clear that this has an impact on chick survival; there may be no apparent detriment, possibly due to compensatory feeding. However, some work, for example on Marsh Harriers, has shown a reduction in survival or reduced chick condition, which may reduce future survival or breeding productivity. After a chick has fledged it is difficult to determine whether there is an effect on survival, or future reproduction, and this period has been little studied. Finally, the absence of an obvious behavioural response to disturbance does not necessarily imply no effect of people on foot. Recent studies suggest that increasing numbers and proximity of visitors in seabird colonies leads to reduced breeding productivity in Kittiwakes and Guillemots; these impacts can be reduced if viewpoints are set back further from nests.

Non-breeding birds

Disturbance can reduce feeding resources, such as farmland available to geese. In many cases, birds may compensate for this loss of feeding time, but in some circumstances, such as pre-migratory fattening or

poor weather, capacity may be reduced. This can lead to reduced future breeding productivity, as found in Pink-footed Geese disturbed at migration stopover feeding sites on agricultural land. Alternatively, increased mortality may result - demonstrated for estuarine Oystercatchers, due to disturbance during periods of severe weather. However, a study of non-breeding Black tailed Godwits on estuaries in eastern England found no effects of human disturbance (though severe weather periods were not studied).

Care is needed when generalizing from individual studies, because circumstances and species' responses may differ. Birds may be able to compensate for the effects of disturbance in many situations, by nesting, feeding or roosting in undisturbed areas or by compensatory feeding in areas or at times with less disturbance. However, if populations are already under pressure, such as rare species, those with inadequate habitat or food, or in poor weather conditions, disturbance may have a disproportionate effect, leading to potential impacts on population size. The review highlights the need for more robust studies of disturbance, to include interactions with other factors, such as weather and habitat – which may modify the influence of disturbance.

Changes in bird distribution and abundance, caused by disturbance on protected sites in particular, will require action to prevent loss or damage. Statutory restrictions or closures may need to be implemented, if necessary (or possible), to minimise impacts on birds. This is not to suggest that new access provisions will always lead to disturbance or that any disturbance will necessarily be detrimental to nature conservation. However, there is a need to deal with those situations where there is the potential for serious effects on birds, as a result of disturbance due to access on foot by people, with or without dogs.

*Emily Woodfield & Rowena Langston (2004). Literature Review on the Impact on Bird Populations of Disturbance due to Human Access on Foot. RSPB Research Report No. 9/English Nature Project Reference FST20-11-011.



Pink-footed Geese disturbed? (Ian Francis)

A Reserve comes of age – Baron's Haugh at 21



(Jimmy Maxwell)

In Part 1, we saw the very beginnings of this reserve near Motherwell with its initial Contract Wardens coping with all sorts of local problems. John Hunt goes on now to mention some developments and introduces the first Full-time Warden. JM (Ed.)

Part Two:

The Next Stage – John Hunt (then RSPB Reserves officer)

After surveys and consultation, a management plan was prepared which aimed to diversify and improve habitats while providing facilities for the public. The most eagerly awaited move was the flooding of the 35 ha of haughland. Extensive banks, which had originally been built to keep the river out, worked very well at keeping water in, once the outflow sluice was operating well. With a small burn, rainfall and several upwellings to provide an input of fresh water, it was relatively easy to raise levels and then control them during the year to benefit nesting and wintering birds as well as passage waders in the autumn. It was very rewarding to see this happen and how quickly the birds responded, with big increases in numbers and variety.

Under Russell Nisbet's care and help from local members, further habitat improvements followed and soon the use of the reserve was to increase enormously.

Full-time Warden - Russell Nisbet

(now Nature Consultant and Wildlife Tours Leader)

I started wardening at Baron's Haugh in 1985 and became involved in most of the major improvements at the Reserve, such as the creation of islands, the building of four wooden hides, the Clyde Walkway being upgraded, the car park being constructed, teacher naturalists and summer wardens



Russell in Hide

(Stuart Conway)

being employed and the planting of hundreds of trees. The job naturally meant also working together with the local Community and the local RSPB Hamilton Area Members' Group. During the time that I worked at the Haugh, I had many memorable experiences with bird sightings - here are a few of them... I was sitting in the Marsh Hide with a few friends, including Ian Shedden, who spotted a bird on the far side of the Haugh. Through a telescope, we thought it looked like a Lesser Whitethroat as one was nesting near there at the time, but a few features were not quite right - further investigation proved the bird to be our first record of a male Red-backed Shrike. Talking about the Lesser Whitethroat reminds me of the pleasure I had first watching an adult carrying food to its young - the perfect outcome after listening to the male bird in full song some weeks earlier. Another great experience came when a few of us gathered at dusk in the Causeway Hide to wait for the Barn Owl to emerge from the Goldeneye nestbox and go hunting over the fields. And then, of course, there was the early, damp evening when our one-and-only White-winged Black Tern appeared. I think this was the time my mobile phone had maximum use, to let as many friends know



Checking the river with 'Glen' (Jimmy Maxwell)

as possible, and I even managed to commission Duncan Watt to paint a picture of it for me. The next memory is of the Great Grey Shrike which made a single appearance at the Haugh, then popped over the Clyde to Merryton Ponds to spend a few weeks there for many to admire. A similar thing happened with the Pomarine Skua which firstly visited the Haugh, then spent many winter weeks chasing the gulls at Strathclyde Country Park! The sight of a Hobby catching insects over the River Clyde also brings back memories as does the lovely Spoonbill which appeared for a single day. The calls of Quail from the long grass in front of the Centenary Hide are still ringing in my ears as are the flight calls of Wood Sandpipers winging their way northward. Ospreys and Marsh Harriers have visited, and a really exciting time of year was the 1st of July when the sluice gate was opened to allow the Haugh water to flow into the Clyde, thus exposing some lovely mud which would attract waders. Regular visitors have been Black-tailed Godwits, and I will always remember when a Peregrine swooped down in amongst the Lapwings and Golden Plovers to select this visitor - the only Godwit on the reserve! It struck in mid-air, the wader dropping into the water, and like an Osprey, came back to pick the bird off the surface and take it to a nearby pylon to devour.



Godwit on the menu

(Jimmy Maxwell)

There are many, many more bird experiences, but a couple of mammals should be mentioned. Firstly the Otter which is back and thriving, and secondly a sighting I had from the Marsh Hide whilst having lunch. A Heron was attempting to chase and catch a Weasel. I felt sure that the mammal would easily get away, but being marshy ground it was obviously having a bit of bother and the Heron managed to stab, drown then swallow the beast in one gulp. I looked on flabbergasted!

It was great to come across a first small colony of Ringlet butterflies which are now one of the commonest seen. Over 70 species of Hoverflies have been identified, and if the expert had had more time, he might have recorded a few more!

During my eleven years at Baron's Haugh, certain unforgettable landmarks still remain



Wet work at the Marsh Hide

(John Reid)

Major developments have included the removal of all the electricity pylons from the reserve - always a threat to passing Whooper Swans.

The RSPB official most in charge now is Mike Trubridge who will provide the last part of our account. JM



Russell with Jimmy

(H. Baillie)

in the memory. The official Opening in 1988 with Jimmy Macgregor and a host of guests - the burning and rebuilding of all the Hides - the terrifying times when the river rose and invaded the Haugh and of course the many visiting groups I enjoyed showing round the reserve.

However, I feel that praise should be given to the foresight of the original members of Hamilton Area Members' Group who managed to persuade the powers that be in the RSPB to create this reserve allowing so many people to reap such a rich reward.

Russell Nisbet left in 1995 and since then many more rarities have turned up such as Alpine Swift, Leach's Petrel, several Spotted Crakes and a Corncrake, Temminck's Stint and Pectoral Sandpiper. Local RSPB group work parties have continued to remove rubbish regularly and indulge in various Haugh tasks - usually wet ones!

Area Reserves Officer RSPB - Mike Trubridge

With Russell's departure, the staffing set up at Baron's Haugh changed. The site is now managed by several RSPB staff in the region. Initially this was done by myself with assistance from Lochwinnoch staff, more recently the assistance has come from Mark Davies from the Glasgow Office. During this period the main task has been to maintain standards and infrastructures, doing the usual round of routine maintenance work that most sites require - vegetation cutting, fence repairs, litter collecting, footpath and car park maintenance, and of course looking after the four hides. More recently a project commenced to control some of the alien plant species that have colonised the reserve. Both Giant Hogweed and Japanese Knotweed have now been



Robert

almost eradicated from the reserve, while major control of Snowberry and Rhododendron has also taken place.

In addition to the RSPB staff already mentioned, Robert Hartness has for many years done voluntary work at Baron's Haugh. Nearly every day of the week would find him and his collie dogs going round the reserve, doing odd jobs and generally keeping an eye on the place. Sadly in 2003, ill health forced him to take early retirement from this work, everyone was sorry to see him go. The RSPB is extremely grateful for all his endeavours over the years. However, in recent years we have been most fortunate to have teams of workers from the North Lanarkshire Council Restorative Justice helping out. This invaluable work has included mowing pathside vegetation, keeping drainage channels clear, sweeping out the hides, picking up litter and many other odd jobs.

It is pleasing to see the continued and expanding support of the local press in terms of the RSPB in general and Baron's Haugh in particular, at least seven Lanarkshire local newspapers now regularly including the monthly "wildlife on your doorstep" column or press releases. This coverage has helped to raise the profile of the reserve and its guided walks programme. A new project for 2003 was the butterfly transect monitoring around the Haugh, shared equally by RSPB



Grey Partridge

(by local YOC member)

staff and volunteers, providing interesting and valuable information both for the reserve and for butterfly conservation.

One of the downsides in being so close to Motherwell is that the reserve is occasionally used as a depository for unwanted and stolen items. It's quite amazing what has turned up over the years. In particular, there seems to be a never ending supply of tools and equipment, presumably removed from building sites. We have now accumulated a very good selection of spades, shovels, picks, wheelbarrows, ladders and tarpaulins. Two of the more unusual items abandoned on the reserve include several bags of toys (still in their boxes), which we donated to a local children's hospital, and a brand new double mattress, complete with plastic wrapping, which was quickly appropriated by one of the regular visitors to the reserve! We have even had birds dumped at Baron's Haugh, probably left behind by well-meaning members of the public. Several white farmyard geese appeared, which were then caught and passed on to a local goose enthusiast. Others included two Chioe Wigeon and some Golden Pheasants, which raised a few birding eyebrows! Animals too have been "donated" – notably



Otter - a reserve regular

(Lang Stewart)

two large Terrapins - it's amazing that these animals have managed to survive this far north, but presumably they have been assisted by the warm upwellings on the Haugh that ensure the open water rarely freezes over completely.

But at the end of the day it's the native birds and other wildlife that really matter. Naturally there have been gains and losses since the reserve was established. In recent years both Willow Tit and Grey Partridge have been lost as breeding birds. Both these species are suffering major declines throughout the UK, so perhaps this is not particularly surprising. Red Squirrels too have disappeared, the last record was in 1989. On the plus side, Buzzards have now become very common in the area and breed successfully in most years. Gadwall continue to do well and Baron's Haugh is still one of the best places in Scotland to see this species. But perhaps the most welcome sights in recent years have been family parties of otters, both on the reserve and the adjacent River Clyde. Earlier this year an adult otter with two cubs was seen on the Haugh several times, much to the delight of visitors in the hides. With our wildlife constantly changing, who knows what might turn up next? But throughout all these changes, Baron's Haugh remains a wonderful place to visit, whether it is for birdwatching, dog walking or simply taking a stroll in the country.

If you wish to check on current bird sightings at Baron's Haugh or need further information, log on to the reserve website at www.baronshaugh.co.uk



The rubbish gang

(Jimmy Maxwell)



Seabird breeding failures, climate change and wind farms

Puffin in southern North Sea (Lang Stewart)

David MacArthur claimed (SBN 73) that breeding failures of seabirds in Orkney and Shetland were caused by global warming which has 'caused planktonic species to move further north, resulting in a crash of the sandeel populations in this area'. I have to take issue with this statement of "fact". The truth is that the cause of the reduction in sandeel populations in the northern North Sea is not known. We do know that the decline in sandeel stock around Shetland has been the main cause of seabird breeding failure there in 2003 and 2004. One of my Ph.D. students, Sarah Davis, demonstrated that giving supplementary food to Arctic skuas allowed them to increase their breeding success, to reduce their foraging effort from the extremely high levels needed to try to keep chicks alive when sandeels are so scarce, and to improve their prospects for surviving to the next breeding season; so their breeding failure was obviously due to food shortage. These seabird breeding failures are the worst seen in Shetland since research on seabirds and monitoring of their numbers and breeding success in Shetland developed in the early 1970s. In a paper published in Marine Ecology Progress Series, Dr Steve Arnott and Prof. Graeme Ruxton at Glasgow University showed that the recruitment of young sandeels in the southern North Sea was

stronger in years with cooler sea temperature in spring, but they found no effect of sea temperature on sandeel recruitment in the northern North Sea. So climate warming may indeed reduce sandeel recruitment, and so reduce food supply for seabirds, but possibly only in the southern North Sea.

The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) monitors sea temperatures and reported that 2002 was an exceptionally warm spring in the North Sea, but in 2003 spring sea temperature was no higher than average. So blaming the poor recruitment of sandeels in 2003 on warmer conditions seems not to fit the hydrographic observations in 2003, and also ignores the fact that no relationship between sea temperature and recruitment has been evident in historical data in the northern North Sea. We know that sandeel larvae do not drift all that far before they recruit and settle into the sea bed along with the older fish. Once recruited, sandeels do not migrate. So numbers of sandeels in the northern North Sea will not be determined by processes occurring in the southern North Sea, but are affected by what happens around northern Scotland where there are large areas of sandeel spawning that produce recruits into the Shetland and northern North Sea sandeel stocks.

If the recruitment failure of sandeels was simply a response to zooplankton moving further north because of warming sea temperatures, then we might expect sandeel shortages to be most obvious in the southern North Sea. It is still not clear whether sandeel recruitment has been very poor everywhere in the North Sea, or has been worst in the northwest. Certainly seabird breeding failures have been extreme in Shetland, strong in Orkney, but rather less evident further south. But seabirds in the southern North Sea have alternative foods – in the south there are young herring and sprats to fall back on if sandeels are scarce, but there are no, or very few, sprats and young herring around Shetland.

I suggest that the sandeel problem may be rather complex, and that we are still a long way from understanding the cause. While climate warming may be contributing, another change that has gone almost unnoticed (but is documented in ICES reports) is a huge increase in herring abundance in the North Sea. Herring are migratory, and spawn predominantly in the northwest North Sea but their larvae drift south so that they grow in the southern North Sea. Adult herring tend to congregate during winter and spring in the northwest North Sea and they feed on sandeel larvae and large zooplankton. The consumption by herring is enormous, and might be enough to explain both the low survival of sandeel larvae in recent springs and the change in zooplankton communities in the North Sea. Selective predation of large zooplankton by adult herring has been shown in the Norwegian Sea to lead to changes in zooplankton community composition very similar to the changes in North Sea zooplankton that have been attributed by the media to effects of climate warming.

In the 1960s the herring stock of the North Sea was drastically reduced by overfishing. One result seems to have been increases in sandeel stocks and good feeding conditions for seabirds. Although gannets can swallow adult herring, most other seabirds can't cope with such big fish, so the change from adult herring to sandeels from the late 1960s may be a major reason why our seabirds increased so much in numbers through the 1970s and up until quite recently. If this scenario is accurate, then the recent recovery of herring stock to an abundance matched only before the 1960s, may represent the return of the northern North Sea to a more 'natural' ecosystem dominated by adult herring, but with fewer sandeels and perhaps also fewer seabirds.

Climate change may be contributing to the decline of sandeels, but at the moment we really do not know enough about this to claim that the seabird breeding failures are due to global warming rather than, perhaps, to a recovery of the herring stocks we depleted by overfishing.

Regardless of the question of what caused seabird breeding failures, we are signed up to the Kyoto Protocol requiring the UK to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. So there is a political imperative to greatly increase the numbers of wind farms in the UK. Scotland generates about 50,000

wind farms in several ways. They can be killed by collision. They can be indirectly affected if they have to avoid wind farms by flying a longer route from A to B. They can be affected by loss of foraging habitat if they avoid wind farms. These issues still require research before we can evaluate the cost to birds of increased numbers of wind farms. This is especially true where seabirds and marine wind farms are concerned. The world leader in both the technology and environmental monitoring of marine wind farms is Denmark, but Germany and the UK are rapidly building these now too. Because the sea depth affects the engineering



Guillemot (Lang Stewart)



Kittiwakes (Jimmy Maxwell)

GigaWatt-hours of electricity per year (and indeed we export substantial amounts of electricity to England and Northern Ireland). In 2000-02 over 55% of our electricity generation came from fossil fuels so contributes directly to carbon dioxide emissions. Another 34% came from nuclear power. Wind generation provided less than 1%. A modern wind turbine produces only one or two MegaWatts. So we would need literally thousands of wind turbines across Scotland to substitute for fossil and nuclear power. The Scottish Executive has set a target of 40% of electricity generated from renewables by 2020, and it seems that wind power is the most likely way to achieve the increase. So there is an urgent need to learn how wind farms affect the environment, and how to select sites that minimize these adverse impacts of a technology designed to improve the environment. Birds can be affected by

difficulty and cost, there is a strong tendency to select locations where the sea depth is about 5 m of water over sand banks which are just right for winter foraging by divers and sea ducks such as scoters and Eiders.

For several years I've been chairing an international panel of marine ecologists

appointed to advise the Danish government on the scientific quality and implications of monitoring of environmental impacts of marine wind farms in Danish waters. The first results of the studies in Denmark suggest that seabirds strongly avoid flying through wind farms and so are likely to be affected more by loss of foraging habitat than by deaths from collisions. But the long-term effect of these marine wind farms on seabirds is still not certain. Early results suggest that under most weather conditions seabirds rather easily avoid collision, and some species (unfortunately mostly cormorants and gulls) may even benefit from enhanced feeding opportunities created by the 'artificial reef' effect of turbine foundations and the absence of fishing within the wind farm area leading to enhanced abundance of fish.

In conclusion, large numbers of wind farms may be essential in the UK if we are to meet our international obligations to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, but the rapid development of wind farms, especially in marine areas important for inshore seabirds, represents a somewhat uncertain hazard for birds.

Dr. Bob Furness
(University of Glasgow)



All for one and one for all

NOTES & COMMENT

More on Nuthatches

An SOC member, K.W.Brewster, from Birmingham has written to express the view that the spread of Nuthatches northwards may be due indirectly to global warming; he writes "Global warming has caused insect populations to increase in more northerly latitudes and this, together with the effects of Dutch Elm Disease has caused woodpeckers and Nuthatches to follow them. The Nuthatches find the old woodpecker holes useful to breed in, providing local mud is available". He suggests that this may be a more important cause of the spread than the proliferation of garden peanut feeders which make the monitoring of this species so straightforward. He finishes – "as I write this note, a Nuthatch is calling from the insect-laden sycamore tree in our suburban garden"

Any other views regarding the movements of this species are welcome.

(Eds.)

Request for sightings - Colour-Ringed Waxwings

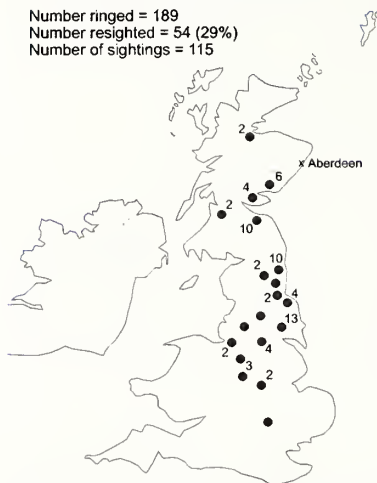
The numbers of Waxwings arriving in Scotland this autumn suggest we might be seeing one of our largest invasions ever. By the end of October, flocks were appearing all over the northern half of the country, many containing several hundred birds. One flock in Forres (Moray) was estimated to contain up to 1,500 birds, surely the largest single flock ever to be seen in Britain.

Several ringing groups and individuals, from Shetland to Tayside, have managed to ring over 250 birds during late October. Over 100 of these have been individually colour-ringed so please check all legs for ringed birds. Interesting movements have already been recorded this autumn with a bird ringed in Stornoway being retrapped 10 days later 290kms to SE near Aberdeen. Another bird ringed on Shetland was retrapped near Aberdeen the following weekend.

The last substantial October/November invasions in Britain were in the early 1990s. During that invasion, 189 waxwings were colour-ringed around Aberdeen. Thanks to a superb effort by birdwatchers, 115 reports of 54 colour-ringed birds were received from areas outwith Aberdeenshire that winter (see map). It will be interesting to see if the current influx of birds follows a similar pattern of movements to those of winter 1990/91. More information about Waxwing movements in Britain can be obtained in the recently published BTO Migration Atlas.

Waxwings colour-ringed in Aberdeen, November and December 1990

Number ringed = 189
Number resighted = 54 (29%)
Number of sightings = 115



All colour-ringed Waxwing sightings will be gratefully received, please email to: raymond@waxwing.fsnet.co.uk. An acknowledgement with full history of the bird and an update of the project results will be sent to you.

Raymond Duncan

Chaffinches

This morning I witnessed what is to me peculiar behaviour of a group of Chaffinches. A male Chaffinch landed on the clipped cotoneaster hedge about 8 feet from my bedroom window and began to inspect the top of the hedge closely. It pecked at a leaf and then immediately flicked its beak under its wing, continuing to repeat this manoeuvre every few seconds. Both wings were used randomly. It was then joined by another male who began the identical procedure, and then another. Soon there were 4 males and 2 females all together, doing exactly the same thing. I watched them for about 5 minutes. I could see no insect life on the hedge and although it had been damp in the night, there was no obvious moisture on the leaves. A preening procedure perhaps, using some unknown (to us) chemical? Or perhaps some dance routine of interest only to Chaffinches?

Kenneth C. R. Halliday

Of Redwings and now Song Thrushes

In our last SBN, Chris Mylne included various letters received in response to his note on twittering Redwings. This note is a further comment and extends the discussion into more Thrush sightings...

Chris dealt admirably with his Redwings, except that their chorus may be heard not only in spring but also from migrating flocks in autumn (as at about 0845 hrs on

23 October 2004 at Finzean on Feughside). May I now turn to plumage differences in Song Thrushes? I have been struck in several years by the dark plumage of some passage thrushes in my garden in Aboyne, for example on 22 September 2004 when a group of 4 Song Thrushes fed on the lawn, probably on honeysuckle berries, a few yards from my window. Our breeding birds were long gone (they depart in July or August), so these were early-autumn migrants. At first, I took them to be birds of a western or Hebridean race.

However, BWP states that Song Thrushes from Outer Hebrides and Skye are largely sedentary or move to Ireland, and moreover that there is a problematic racial identification, namely the regular autumn occurrence on North Sea coasts of a small dark form, dark enough to recall *hebridensis* but with some plumage differences, and hence of unknown origin. Aboyne is hardly coastal, but my birds were gone next day. Where do they come from and where do they go? The birds were in very distinct plumage, much darker than our garden-nesting Song Thrushes but with the centres of their bellies white, becoming slightly darker on their flanks and with breast and flanks intensely and boldly spotted very dark brown or black. They were striking birds, definitely recalling Mistle Thrushes, though smaller and with no white in their dark tails, so that I wondered if they nested somewhere where Mistle Thrushes were scarce or absent. Has anyone else seen birds like these Song Thrushes?

David Jenkins

David's book "Of Partridges and Peacocks....." was reviewed in SBN 71

Caption Pics

Provide a caption for the bird picture below and have a chance of winning an SOC hat. Each SBN edition will feature a new photo. The winner and other best captions will be shown in SBN 75. Send your single caption by E-mail to: jimmy.maxwell@virgin.net



(Lang Stewart)

BOOK REVIEWS

Beguiled by Birds. Wallace, Ian 2004. Illustrated by Ian DIM Wallace. ChristopherHelm/AC Black London, 272 pp, profusely illustrated in colour & many B&W photos ISBN 0-7136-6535 £29.99

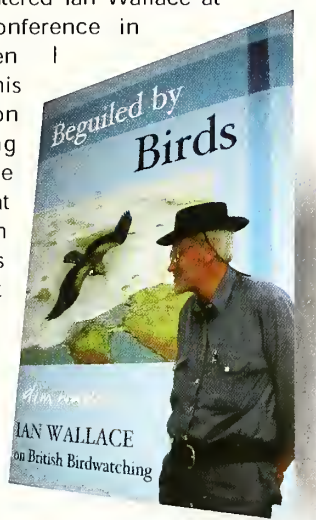
I first encountered Ian Wallace at the SOC Conference in 2003. When I heard that his new book on birdwatching was to be launched at the British Bird Fair this year, I knew it would be a special event and made a point of catching his presentation. As it turned out his talk, in a big marquee, was assaulted by low flying USAF jets plus a very loud rainstorm.

Despite this, he had the audience completely captivated. Ian, (alias DIM) Wallace is that rare being, a one off, fearless, witty, analytical and creative individual whose lifelong interest in birdwatching has enabled him to produce a comprehensive book covering the history and scope of birdwatching in the UK.

He successfully tackles the ambitious task of documenting the history of British birdwatching over the last 125 years, interleaving this with his own experiences on birdwatching expeditions. These trips took him to many places in the UK and to other exotic destinations that most of us can only dream about.

He has invested a huge amount of time and effort researching this book and documenting many key milestones in the social history of birdwatching, including a long list of committed organisations and many colourful characters.

Apart from the mainly chronologically arranged text and notable anecdotes about many famous birdwatchers and "twitches", he has filled the 272 pages with lots of his accomplished paintings. Many of these mark a favourite birdwatching moment. If this was not enough, he has also included lots of interesting archive photos from the good old days. The design team at Fluke



Art in Cornwall deserve plaudits for their interesting layout, which helps combine the many pictorial elements of Ian's interesting life.

As the SOC's Development Manager, I especially appreciated the analytical business eye, which he casts over the development of birdwatching as a business activity in recent years. Ian describes the pleasure and pain of purposeful birdwatching and gives others, less afflicted, a colourful insight into what makes committed birdwatchers tick.

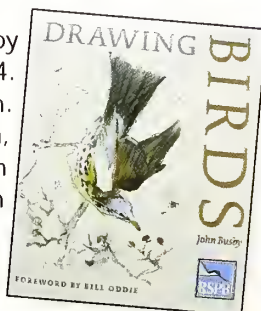
Naturally, SOC characters are regularly mentioned, especially his lifelong friend Dougal Andrew, plus interesting encounters with George Waterston and the two good ladies.

This is a serious book and a great read, especially for other bibliophiles. I could not put it down and was definitely beguiled by "Beguiled by Birds"

Long may your ZEISS 6x30's not mist up Ian!

Bill Gardner MBE
(SOC Development Manager)

Drawing Birds by John Busby. 2004. Second Edition. Christopher Helm, London. (in association with the RSPB) 143 pp. ISBN 0-7136-6816-4. £19.99



It is sixteen years since the first edition of *Drawing Birds* was published, with acclaim from all connected with bird art; in particular it was welcomed by those taking their first steps in attempting to draw and paint birds and by their teachers.

This second edition, fully revised, is as inspiring as ever and even better than before.

The layout of the chapters sets out exactly the stages involved in drawing birds (after a look at how birds have been seen in art by various artists and cultures over the years). First, and most importantly, to draw birds you really have to look at them with a different eye and in detail, as well as trying to get hold of that hard to define "jizz" or personality of the species. Then John Busby deals with Anatomy, so important in birds which tend to conceal much of their structure with overlying feather masses. Chapters follow on

drawing birds in the water and in the air; finishing with discussion and many examples of how to employ colour and composition to best advantage.

The book is inspirational for several reasons: John Busby's own love and deep understanding of his subjects shines through every page and is so well shown by his own drawings throughout. But he has also had the humility and generosity to include large numbers of other artists' work (both contemporary and historic) to very good effect, illustrating the point that no two artists will ever produce an identical picture of a bird and showing the great range of techniques and mediums that can be used. There is an excellent bibliography.

This book is a pleasure to read and reread; not just for those interested in drawing birds but for all who go birding at any level; it should surely be on every bookshelf and will also be a wonderful way of introducing the young to the joys of watching and drawing birds.

Michael Gear

Birds of Prey in a Changing Environment. Thompson, D.B.A., Redpath, S.M., Fielding, A.H., Marquiss, M., & Galbraith, C.A. (Eds.) SNH 2003. The Stationery Office. £35.00.

This book presents updated material from the December 2000 SNH/JNCC/BOU Conference on this important topic, drawn from recent and new research. The 41 chapters, each with a user-friendly summary, focus mainly on birds of prey in Britain. However, the review of "numbers and status" (Theme 1) also contains much European information and includes studies conducted in France, Iceland and Spain. The other Themes are "population", "behaviour", "land use change", "conservation" and "conflicts with humans".

There are 16 excellent colour plates, many of nests (predictably, given the intensive nature of most studies), including most appropriately two of illegal killing - two poisoned Red Kites and a pole-trapped Buzzard.

Whether this book qualifies as bedtime, holiday or airport reading depends on how keen a raptorophile one is. It is not only an essential reference for anyone with an interest in birds of prey, but, given the importance of raptors as indicators of environmental wellbeing, is also worthy of attention from all who care about conservation.

Trevor Smith

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RECENT REPORTS

A Review of autumn 2004

What an autumn! No fewer than four firsts for Britain were seen in Scotland and it was, almost inevitably, the Outer Hebrides that kicked it all off again with the discovery of a 1st-winter **Purple Martin** at the Butt of Lewis on 5th-6th September. A long-predicted addition to the British list (and also the first confirmed record for the Western Palearctic), the bird's premature departure meant that only around 60 people managed to see it. When found, the bird remained almost exclusively around the lighthouse at the Butt. The 6th being a lovely sunny day however, it soon started to range more widely, eventually heading off high to the NW in the early afternoon, much to the chagrin of those arriving late on that day's ferry. The end of



Purple Martin, Lewis

(Robert Wymess)

October also brought another much-predicted British first with a juv. **Masked Shrike** at Kilrenny (Fife) on 29th Oct-15th Nov. Found by Tom Glass on the 29th it was identified the next morning as a Woodchat Shrike but it soon became apparent that this was a wrong call. By mid-afternoon on the 30th the correct identification as Masked Shrike was evolving, but those that made the dash that day could have waited, as what turned out to be one of Scotland's largest ever twitches lasted for two weeks!

During September, Fair Isle was lying low whilst other islands, notably Whalsay and Foula grabbed the headlines. It could only muster one BBRC rarity during September albeit that was a male **Red-flanked Bluetail** on 29th. October there produced a **Lanceolated Warbler** on 4th (with a very late one also on Bressay on 26th) and a **Booted Warbler** on 5th (with another seen



Chestnut-eared Bunting, Fair Isle

(Deryk Shaw)

on Unst on 20th-21st Sept) but, as is now traditional, it was again the third week of October that was the time to be there. With Siberian Rubythroat and Savannah Sparrow both seen in the equivalent week last year, it seemed impossible that it could possibly be better - but this year it was. A bunting at one of the observatory's own newly created crops at the South Light was tentatively identified on the 15th as a Little Bunting, but it was not a comfortable identification and so it was trapped the next day and subsequently identified as a 1st-winter male **Chestnut-eared Bunting**. It remained in the crop there until the 20th. Superficially perhaps initially suggesting Little Bunting with its eponymous 'chestnut ears' it was the combination of bi-coloured bill, prominent eye-ring, chestnut scapular area

and diagnostic black and chestnut breast markings as well as structure, that all added up to a Western Palearctic first on the island where, originating from eastern Siberia and northern China, it should be a possibility.

Amazingly the following Saturday, the 23rd Oct, yet another first for the Western Palearctic was discovered on Fair Isle - a 1st-winter **Rufous-tailed Robin** - a taiga dwelling eastern Asia species. Also known as Swinhoe's Red-tailed Robin and Whistling Nightingale, these names somehow conjuring up the mystique that often surrounds these Far East cripples - you can somehow just imagine one hopping around in the taiga in Siberia and you struggling to see it. No such problems with this bird on Fair Isle as it fed out in the



Masked Shrike, Fife

(Jim Duncan)

open along the dry stone walls at Bull's Park. Unfortunately a clear night meant it was not seen again after that. On top of all of the above, it was another rarity-filled autumn, with Shetland as always to the fore. Foula had stolen most of the plaudits prior to Fair Isle's late retaliation with three different **Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers** seen there between 1st-5th Oct (with another nearby at the Pool of Virkie on 6th-7th Oct) as well as two different **Pechora Pipits** on 5th-20th Oct. Best of all was a 1st-winter male **Common Yellowthroat** on 9th-10th Oct with another male seen nearby at Maywick on 14th (3rd-4th records for Shetland after spring birds in 1984 and 1997). In Sept. an ad. male **Brown Shrike**, of the form *cristatus* was at Skaw, Whalsay on 19th-24th – third Scottish record and fourth for Britain, with all previous Scottish records also being autumn adults. Also on Whalsay a **Pied Wheatear** was seen at Skaw on 10th Oct with another also on Shetland at Scousburgh on 23rd Oct. Nearby an **Isabelline Wheatear** was at Sumburgh Head on 22nd-25th Oct (fourth for



Yellow Warbler, Barra

(Jim Duncan)

Wagtails were seen on Shetland between 6th Sept-7th Oct with up to nine **Arctic Redpolls** reported between 29th Sept-23rd Oct all on Shetland apart from singles on Lewis on 11th-12th Oct, South Uist on 11th Oct and on Tiree on 23rd Oct.

18th-19th Oct and South Uist on 24th-25th Oct), an **Olive-backed Pipit** at Cruden Bay on 17th Oct (with only one other seen, on Fair Isle on 20th Oct), a **Siberian Stonechat** at Collieston on 17th-22nd Oct (with five others in Oct; four on Shetland and one in Caithness at Noss Head on 17th) and a **Blue-winged Teal** on the Ythan Estuary on the 8th Oct. North Ronaldsay had a comparatively quiet autumn though it was responsible for the only **Radde's Warbler** reported – on the 1st Oct. Once again Barra had good coverage this autumn and once again it came up trumps with a 1st-winter **Yellow Warbler** at Breibhig on 2nd-7th Oct – third record for Scotland and fourth for Britain. The female **Redhead** also returned to Barra, being seen on Loch an Duin on 8th Nov with nearby on Vatersay a **Western Bonelli's Warbler** on 23rd Oct with two others on Orkney – on Sanday on 12th Oct and at Herston, South Ronaldsay on 29th Oct-15th Nov. Nearby on South Uist, an imm. **Snowy Owl** was present at Loch Bee from the 22nd Oct confirming the Outer Hebrides' current status as the place in Britain to see this species. In Argyll, a 1st-winter **Rufous (Oriental) Turtle Dove** was seen and photographed on Oronsay on at least 7th-9th Oct – if accepted, the fourth to be seen in Scotland in the last three years. On Shetland, in a 'déjà vu' situation from last winter, an **American Coot** was discovered on the Loch of Benston on 13th Nov – could it indeed be last year's bird?



Rufous-tailed Robin, Fair Isle

(Rebecca Nason)

Shetland) whilst an **Isabelline Shrike** was at Vidlin on 17th Oct. A **Yellow-breasted Bunting** was at Toab on 1st-2nd Oct (with a very good mainland Sept. record of one briefly at Spey Bay (Moray) on 20th) and yet another juv **Pallid Harrier** seen on Shetland, at Trondra on 25th-26th Sept, then Bressay on 1st Oct. A **Rustic Bunting** on the Out Skerries on 30th Sept-1st Oct was the only one seen anywhere in Britain this autumn, a **Great Snipe** was at Boddam on 30th Sept, an **Arctic Warbler** on Unst on 6th-7th Sept, and a **Greenish Warbler** on Bressay on 6th. Single **Blyth's Reed Warblers** were on Foula on 2nd-7th Oct and Skaw, Unst on 15th Oct with elsewhere one on Barra (Outer Hebrides) on 8th-10th Oct (the third autumn running there for the species.). Four **Citrine**

It was however the record-breaking showing by **White's Thrush** that was even more impressive. No fewer than five different birds were seen in Oct; four on Shetland including one that showed well at Swining on 10th-20th with the other on Lewis at Brue on 11th-12th. Shetland did have the lion's share of the rarities that were going but North-East Scotland also had a fantastic autumn with a **Hume's Yellow-browed Warbler** at Cove on 16th-22nd Oct (the second record for the region), a **Pallid Swift** at Newburgh on 31st Oct-1st Nov (the first record for the region and fourth for Scotland), and a 1st-winter **Lesser Grey Shrike**, also seen at Newburgh on 31st Oct. Nearby at Collieston was a **Dusky Warbler** on 31st Oct-1st Nov (with others on Fair Isle on

Despite this rarity barrage, totals for most scarcities were relatively low. Around 100 **Yellow-browed Warblers** were seen from 17th Sept mostly on Shetland, though six were on North Ronaldsay on 1st Oct. 15 **Pallas's Warblers** were seen in Oct and early Nov, c55 **Barred Warblers** in Sept and Oct, 22 **Red-breasted Flycatchers** were seen from 21st Sept, 14 **Firecrests** and 10 **Great Grey shrikes** in Oct. and four **Short-toed Larks** were seen from 29th Sept, all on

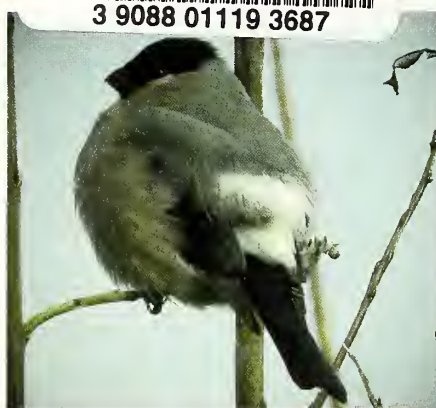
Shetland. The only **Ortolan Bunting** was on Fair Isle on 1st-5th Oct, while seven **Little Buntings** in Oct were all on the Northern Isles; also in Oct, 12 **Bluethroats** were seen in the Northern Isles with one at Sullom on 13th-14th Nov being the latest ever on Shetland. In Oct, three **Hoopoes** were recorded: on North Uist on 1st-5th, one found dead on Yell (Shetland) on 12th and one at Maywick (Shetland) on 15th whilst seven **Rose-coloured Starlings** were seen from 18th Sept, two in Lothian, one on Orkney and four on Shetland.



Waxwing, Lewis

(Martin Scott)

In October and November, the most memorable events were the record invasions by both **Waxwing** and **Northern Bullfinch**. The latter is an annual migrant in Oct and Nov to the Northern Isles where 1,400+ were seen on Shetland, but from 10th Oct onwards the total rose to 2,000 throughout Scotland when record numbers were seen on Orkney and the Outer Hebrides and on the mainland in Caithness, Aberdeenshire, Fife and Lothian. Exact numbers were almost impossible to gauge but 170 different birds were trapped on Fair Isle during Oct and 465 were logged throughout Shetland on the 18th Oct alone. With their "toy trumpet" calls it is thought that this irruption was made up of birds from much further east than the normal Scandinavian migrants. There was also a record-breaking showing by Waxwing with the largest ever influx taking place presumably also involving birds from further east than normal. Record numbers were seen on Shetland, Fair Isle and the Outer Hebrides from 7th Oct onwards with an unprecedented 1,300 birds in one flock seen at Forres (Moray) on 30th-31st Oct. The largest numbers by the end of Oct were in Highland, Moray and Aberdeenshire with perhaps 6,000+ seen in total throughout Scotland in Oct with very large numbers continuing in Nov. Several areas reporting record numbers, with flocks of 300+ being reported from Ayrshire, Dumfries, Glasgow, Clydebank, Dunfermline, Falkirk, Inverness, Dundee, Perth and around Aberdeen, including a flock of 900 at Bridge of Don on 10th Nov. Several parties of **Long-tailed Tits** in unusual areas were perhaps also continental migrants and a white-headed *caudatus* bird



Female Northern Bullfinch, Fair Isle (Deryk Shaw)

was seen near Collieston (Aberdeenshire) on 17th Oct, potentially the first record for Scotland.

It was a very good autumn for North American waders with 9 **American Golden Plovers** seen between 13th Sept-27th Oct in Argyll (2), North-East Scotland, Highland, Caithness, Outer Hebrides (2), Orkney and Shetland. 17 **Pectoral Sandpipers** were seen up to 11th Oct, 11 **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** on 6th Sept-11th Oct, a **White-rumped Sandpiper** was at Northton, Harris (Outer Hebrides) on 20th Sept and three **Baird's Sandpipers** were seen, on Coll (Argyll) on 21st Sept, at the Butt of Lewis on 26th Sept and on North Uist at Loch Paible on 15th-24th Oct.

There was some record breaking sea-watching this Sept with around 100 **Grey Phalaropes** seen in the period including 76 in Sept, most of which were in Argyll and the Outer Hebrides. 1,200+ **Leach's Petrels** were seen in Sept including a record 143 past Frenchman's Rocks, Islay on 21st, with 119 the same day in Argyll past Uisaed Point, Kintyre. On the Outer Hebrides, counts included 138 past Ardvule Point, South Uist on 20th Sept and 92 past Griminish Point, North Uist the next day. Also in Sept, 82 **Sabine's Gulls** were logged, mostly in Argyll and the Outer Hebrides including counts of eight both from Lewis and Frenchman's Rocks, Islay on 21st. Up to five different birds were seen at Dunnet Bay (Caithness) in Sept from the 12th with a 2nd-winter **Bonaparte's Gull** found at Dunnet Bay on 12th. It relocated to nearby Thurso where it remained into November. Small numbers of **Little Auks** occurred throughout Oct, but in Nov, some large numbers were seen briefly in the North Sea around the 13th-14th including 4,457 counted past St Abbs Head (Borders) on 14th. Also in mid Nov a 1st-winter **Ivory Gull** was at Bettyhill (Highland) on at least 15th-17th. The Central Scotland **Taiga Bean Goose** flock was at its highest ever level again this winter with 262 birds counted in early Nov.

Angus Murray

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Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published four times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Editor at the address below no later than five weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) was established by a group of Scottish ornithologists who met together in the rooms of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in Edinburgh on 24th March 1936.

The Club now has 2200 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur birdwatchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all, the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications and an annual conference, and houses the Waterston Library, the most comprehensive library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of branches, which meet in Aberdeen, Ayr, the Borders, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, New Galloway, Orkney, St Andrews, Stirling, Stranraer and Thurso, organise field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the Scottish Birds Records Committee. The latter maintains the 'official' Scottish List on behalf of the Club. The Club supports research and survey work through its Research Grants.

The Club maintains a regularly-updated web site, which not only contains much information about the Club, but is also the key source of information about birds and birdwatching in Scotland.

www.the-soc.org.uk

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